

# THE HUSBAND'S POINT

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS

(Continued from Last Sunday's Times.)

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Dr. Arnold Stagg, of New York, while visiting his cousin, James Stagg, of Utica, district attorney of Onondaga county, idea into the country and is forced to marry Beatrice Forrest at the instigation of his cousin, who believed she was sleeping with him. He leaves her father serving a life sentence for murder, and while he tells his cousin of his forced marriage, word is received that the girl's father has escaped. Dr. Stagg decides to protect the girl and goes to Parson Lee, her uncle, the one who forced her to marry her, for a certificate. While there some one shoots the parson and Dr. Stagg is locked up, suspected of the shooting. Later Parson Lee recovers and says the man who shot him was attempting to shoot Dr. Stagg. The parson's statement exonerates Dr. Stagg, and the detectives set to work to find a clue to the man who shot Parson Lee. Forrest, Beatrice's father, is mentioned, also Firin, the man with whom Beatrice was supposed to be in love when she was forced to marry Dr. Stagg.

## CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

"I am inclined to agree with you. The shot must have been fired at Lee. But by whom? Who had any reason to shoot him? I think John Lee is the man who must give us some information on this subject," said James Stagg.

The chief spoke shortly and to the point. John Lee started as if he had been accused of the attempt on his brother's life.

"Oh, I know nothing about it," he said, the purplish color showing a little in his face. "Do you suspect me?"

"Certainly not. But the fact remains that some one fired a revolver and hit your brother. Dr. Stagg has been exonerated by the parson. The question is, was it the parson or the doctor who was the intended victim?"

"It seems to me that John, studying the mighty problem carefully, said that the shot must have been fired at Stagg. He may have made enemies as Firin, you know."

"But I have not used the name of Firin," I retorted, angrily. "You insist on that, and you are wrong."

"Well," said John, "who is Firin, then? None of us ever saw the man."

"I'm sure I don't know," said the chief. "Remember that time is valuable just now. The constable and I want to get some idea of a clue in order to start our search."

"There might be one man—supposing he had come this way, which he did not," suggested my cousin.

"Forrest?"

"Yes," said John Lee and James Stagg. "Forrest! You don't mean 'Bob'?"

"Unfortunately, he is not," said my cousin. "He escaped."

"Then the whole thing is plain!" exclaimed John Lee, slapping his knee with the palm of his right hand. "Why, it is as clear as June morning. Robert Forrest fired that shot."

"But why at Stagg? He did not know the doctor."

John Lee looked at me and then at the district attorney, as if comparing our appearance.

"You don't look much alike," he said. "I did think that Forrest, holding a grudge against the attorney who convicted him, had fired at you under the impression that it was James."

"No, James Stagg."

"No, James Stagg," said James. "But I tell you Forrest has been traced the other way. He went West from Auburn."

"How was he traced?" asked the chief quickly.

"Why, he and the prison guard left at the same time. A man wearing the guard's clothes was traced as far as Rome, and the clue came to an end. Another, answering to the description of Forrest, wearing a new suit of clothing, has been traced almost as far west as Chautauqua."

The chief looked at the floor studiously.

"Forrest could have had no reason to shoot Dr. Stagg, and it is not likely that he mistook the doctor for the lawyer. My own impression is that if Forrest fired the shot he fired at Lee."

"But the parson was not even a witness at his trial," put in my cousin.

"By Jove! I've got it! James Stagg was not thought of. James Lee was the man whose testimony sent Forrest to prison. If Forrest fired that shot, he fired at Stagg, thinking he was James Lee. It was a fatal mistake. It was in the parson's library. The man might have come here for the purpose of shooting James Lee. Creeping up to the window he saw the parson engaged in conversation with a young man. He fired, thinking it was the parson's son."

"Gentlemen," I said, "these theories are all very pretty, but they won't work. In the first place, I don't believe I was the man shot at. In the second place, I don't believe Robert Forrest was the man who fired the shot. I don't hold with my cousin that he went West. I saw him in Pawnee church, and know that Beatrice went away with him. Now, if Robert Forrest escaped from prison, came here to meet his daughter, and planned to go far away and begin life anew, he would not risk his chance by committing a murder."

"He did it once," said James Lee. "He is not so sure of that. Had it not been for your father's words I would undoubtedly have been tried and perhaps convicted on circumstantial evidence. But we are not just now concerned with that. The thing is, that if Forrest did not fire the shot, some one of your father must have done it."

"Or yours," put in my cousin.

"We are overlooking certain facts," interposed the chief. "Let me ask you, doctor, if anything was said in the church that would show you to be connected with this district attorney?"

"Yes; Beatrice called to her father and said I was James Stagg's cousin."

"So, and you were married to Beatrice against your will and hers. Might it not have been a mad scheme of his to rid his daughter of a husband she did not like?"

so many conflicting theories they confuse us. Now let's put these pieces together and see what the patchwork will turn out. Suppose, Stagg, that you are mistaken, and Forrest did come this way, and did take Beatrice away with him. Now, suppose, too, that this Firin had also planned on meeting Beatrice, or, if not that, admit that he was madly in love with her. She and the doctor were married in the church. It is known in every village near here that she was married to Dr. Stagg, but under the name of Thomas Firin, as we gave it out. We all believe, and everybody thinks, that she accompanied her husband."

"Now, we have to deal with a disappointed lover, this man Firin, who hears that he is married to Beatrice, and knows that he is not. Naturally, he is filled with rage. He lurks about the place. He may be inclined to shoot my brother, or he may be laying for the doctor. He sees Stagg come here, and recognizes him from the bay horse, which almost everybody knows as belonging to James Stagg. He fires in revenge. My brother is the victim."

"That is a good theory," observed the constable. "I am going to hear, he for the doctor left the bay horse takes him to make his escape."

"Have it your own way," said my cousin. "I am sure that Forrest was not the man who took the girl away. She undoubtedly went with this Firin."

"Well, we must go," said the chief. "We must follow the bay. Whoever the assassin was, it is certain he rode away on Stagg's horse."

He shook hands with me again, and went out, following by the village constable.

"We must not remain idle," said my cousin. "We have work to do as well as the police. I think the first thing we should do is to try to learn something about this Firin. Who knows him? Where was he stopping?"

"None of us knew the man," said James Lee. "I am going to hear, he for the doctor left the bay horse takes him to make his escape."

"Had you ever seen him with your cousin?"

"No! Or I'd—," began James Lee. Then he paused.

"Well, the whole thing is the deepest mystery I ever tackled," said my cousin. "I am going to get to the bottom of it. Suppose we go down to the hotel and see what we can dig out about Firin."

My cousin, James Lee, and I started. John Lee remained with the parson.

The New Hartford Hotel was a wooden building standing on Genesee Street, opposite the court house, and facing the high sounding title of Exchange Place. The usual wooden drinking trough was in front, and I had often stopped there to give the bay some water.

We found the proprietor of the hotel a genial individual, and he was apparently smitten with a sort of paralysis when he learned that his usual peaceful resort was to be mixed up in a murder mystery.

He knew my cousin by sight, and knew James Lee very well. I was introduced, this being merely a perfunctory act on his part.

"We do not wish any publicity at present," said James. "We are investigating the matter quietly."

I smiled as I thought of the quiet and secret act of racing me, bound with cords, along the principal street of central New York in Lee's wagon.

"You may rest assured I will help you in any way I can," said the proprietor of the hotel.

"Have you had a guest by the name of Thomas Firin?"

"Why-yes," said the host, opening his eyes in surprise. "You don't suspect him?"

"Possibly," said James. "Now, what about this Firin? Who is he? How long had he been in your hotel?"

"Why—let me see—this is a great surprise to me, gentlemen. Thomas Firin came here about a month ago. He had been here once before. But only for a day or two."

"Why did he come here? What business had he? How did he spend his time? How is it that no one seems to know this man, when as a rule in a place like this everybody knows what is going on?"

"Why-why-Firin—that is—Firin did not wish to be known."

"Just so. But why? What reason did he give?"

"Why-why—he was a secret service man. He was on the lay for a suspected illicit distiller somewhere between here and Paris Hill."

"Huh! An illicit still, eh? Then he told you he was a detective."

"Secret service man, he called it."

"Ever see his badge?"

"He had a badge. I never looked at it closely."

"What manner of looking man was he? Wore a beard?"

"Sometimes," said the hotel man, cautiously.

"Sometimes! Then he used a disguise?"

"Yes, to outfit moonshiners."

"Ever hear of any moonshiners around here?"

I thought that James Lee started again. I began to suspect this young man more than ever. That he was concealing something I was positive.

"He is gone now, of course," said my cousin.

"Yes; he had his trunk and satchels forwarded day before yesterday."

"To what place?"

"Vanderbilt Hotel, Syracuse."

I was sure that James Lee started again.

"Well, keep mum until you hear from me," said James. "Now we will communicate with the Vanderbilt Hotel."

We hurried to the telegraph office. James wrote a dispatch. It was forwarded. We lighted cigars and loafed around a while.

"It won't take long to get an answer," said James.

It did not take long. The machines began to sing. The operator gravely handed out the reply.

"Just as I expected," said James. "The luggage marked Thomas Firin remains unclaimed at the Vanderbilt Hotel."

By this time all New Hartford knew what was taking place. Men, women, and children thronged the streets.

James was a big man. He represented more to the imagination even than the chief of police. The chief had authority only in the city. He depended upon the co-operation of constables in the townships.

Incidentally, I have thought about this. There should be a county detective whose authority extended from one end of the county to the other. He should be a man trained in criminal ways. These county constables have a big case only once in a lifetime, and when they do have one they never know how to go to work on it. Yet, so jealous are they of their own authority that they resent advice from city police.

As we were leaving the telegraph office, we heard a shout from some people who were loitering near the hotel we had just left. It was a good thing for the hotel. The bar did well that day.

We looked up the road. The chief was coming in a wagon, and trotting complacently behind was James' bay.

"Found him in Bendon's farm, near Clinton," said the chief. "Man with brown beard walked into Clinton and took train for the South without buying a ticket. That's our man. I've telegraphed to every station on the line."

"What did you telegraph?" asked James, lowering his voice so that the bystanders could not hear.

"To arrest man with brown beard leaving train."

"You won't get him. Our man wears a brown beard, but it is false. When he leaves the train he will go with a smooth face."

The chief stared, and James related what had been discovered.

The chief then stepped into the telegraph office and began sending messages. Of course, by that time it was probably too late. The fugitive from justice would not be likely to remain on the train long.

Considerably excited, James, the chief, and I returned to Utica. James Lee went back to his home at Pawnee.

"What do you think of James Lee?" I asked.

James studied a moment.

"I'd like to know the truth about one thing," he said, without giving me an answer. "I'd like to know how many men are really in love with Beatrice Forrest."

But little more was said, James being busy with his thoughts, as the chief was busy with his. I cannot truthfully say I had any thoughts that were valuable. I had been in such a complete muddle for a night and a day that I could not think out a theory to save my life.

All I saw was the beautiful, frightened face of Beatrice, and I knew that she needed a friend.

The following day was a busy one for the detectives. They had Robert Forrest in bed, and also the man who shot Parson Lee. The day passed as no arrest was made.

I slept heavily that night, through sheer weariness of body and mind. There was little use doing anything to find Beatrice. When they found her father, she would be found also. Then my turn would come.

Another night passed, and James resumed his interrupted duties, but maintained his interest in the Lee case. It was in the afternoon that I was sitting in the library, and he entered.

I saw at once that something had happened. He had a look that was almost one of terror. He plucked a telegram from his pocket and threw it at me, and sank into a chair.

"Who is it from?" I asked, trembling, as I reached for it.

"From Detective Golden to the chief. Golden says the clue of the man with a beard."

I opened the dispatch and read: Chief Police, Utica: Followed the clue south to Richfield Springs. Man left train without beard. Followed. Suspected man continued on toward Syracuse. I arrived Syracuse this morning. Had help of entire police force this city. This afternoon man answering description found dead in Rainses Law Hotel on North Salina Street. Had brown beard in possession. Had letters addressed to Thomas Firin, and wore badge of Press Club. He has been identified as Ellis Enland of Syracuse, witness in Forrest case. Killed with club, leaving no mark, same manner as Jake Brand. Wire instructions.

## GOLDEN.

I let the paper fall to the floor and sat staring at James. The thrill of horror was upon me. What new devilment had come into the case?

"What kind of a beard did he wear?" asked my cousin, ignoring my interpolation.

"An ordinary brownish beard."

"What kind of a looking man was he without the beard?"

"Had a perfectly smooth face. Light blue eyes. There was a peculiar white mark under one ear. He shaved frequently, so that he could have had a natural beard if he wished."

James Lee started. The action did not escape my cousin's keen eye.

"Do you recognize this description?" he asked abruptly of Lee.

"No. I certainly never saw such a man."

"My cousin half closed his eyes and futively studied the face of James Lee."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A Staggering Blow.

It was the voice of James that called me to myself. I must have taken the sherry, and perhaps more glasses than one.

The empty tumbler stood on the table near my elbow. But it had done me little good. I felt sick and weak.

James, on the other hand, had pulled himself together and was perfectly cool.

"You see," he was saying, "you've got to brace up and face the truth. This idol you have built up in your imagination proves after all to be clay. The girl did go with Firin, who turns out to be Ellis Enland. I cannot understand it myself. She must have been lost to all sense of decency to elope with a witness against her father."

"It's a lie!" I said, vehemently. "I tell you no! Beatrice is too pure and noble a girl to do that."

The smile that came upon my cousin's face angered me.

"You are beside yourself," he said. "You are not able to think. What do you know about her nobility or purity? You saw her only once, and then she was but half conscious. The circumstances were not conducive to calm judgment. You must drop fancy now and take up fact."

"I will not believe it. I will not believe that a girl who loved her father would elope with a man whose testimony had sent him to prison."

"Oh, well, there is no use arguing with you. How, then, do you account for the fact that Enland had her riding habit, and also the letter which you, according to your own statement, gave her in the church?"

I shook my head helplessly. I could not account for it. Yet I clung to my belief in the purity of Beatrice.

"You see, we are arguing in the dark still on this matter. We must go right up to Syracuse and attend the inquest. That may shed some light on the mystery."

"The telegrams said nothing about a revolver," I interposed. "Was one found on Enland?"

"Probably not. But that is nothing. He might have thrown it away."

"But who do you think killed this man?" I asked.

"Why, Bob Forrest, of course. Enland was killed in the same manner as Jake Brand. Forrest seemed to be a perfect fanatic for that kind of killing. What sort of club he uses I cannot imagine."

"But for heaven's sake why should Forrest kill Enland?"

"He had two reasons. One was revenge for testifying against him at the trial. The other was running away with his daughter."

"Then," I said eagerly, "Beatrice must at least be with her father now."

"I should judge so. But come! We have no time to waste. The chief is going to the inquest. The train starts in half an hour."

I dragged myself to my feet and dressed for the short trip to Syracuse. If my brain had been in a whirl before, it was a perfect tornado of doubts and fears now.

I feared everything, doubted everything, believed nothing, and yet had a thousand suspicions. Under the guidance of James I managed to get into the carriage.

We met the chief at the station. It was a little more than an hour's ride to Syracuse. We were met at that station by Gordon and a Syracuse detective.

We were at once conducted to the hotel on North Salina Street, where the body of Enland still lay undisturbed. The coroner had chosen to hold the inquest on the spot.

I trembled as I entered. The hotel was justly described in Golden's telegram as a "house of horrors." Under the guidance of James I managed to get into the carriage.

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"I suppose you mean to ask what we are going to do next," he said. "It is a hard question to answer. It seems clear that our end of the case is finished. Enland was undoubtedly the man who shot Lee, intending to shoot you and rid Beatrice of the incubrance of a husband. He was the man we wanted for a crime committed in our territory."

"The murder of Enland took place in Syracuse, and is the business of the police of that city. However, we shall give them what assistance we can. You see, our chance for Lee's assassin is ended. We've found him; and as he is dead, there is nothing more to be done."

"You are a little ahead there, chief," said James. "Forrest must be found. He is wanted for two murders now."

"Yes, it is certain that the man who killed Brand killed Enland," said the chief.

"Suppose," I suggested, "we argue from the other end. The man who killed Enland was the man who killed Brand."

"What in thunder is the difference?" asked James, staring.

"None, perhaps, only in inference. You assume that Forrest committed both crimes. I hold that you have no proof that he did either."

James shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you will be saying next that Beatrice did not go with Enland."

"I say this: I shall not condemn her until I know. There is some more of your circumstantial evidence. You'd hang your grandmother on circumstantial evidence. I would not. I still believe that Beatrice accompanied her father."

Both my companions shook their heads.

"Where did Enland get the letter and riding habit?"

"By the way, it's a most interesting speculation where Beatrice is now, and what she is wearing," said James.

I shuddered. The same thing had occurred to me. I said nothing.

"It is possible," said the chief. "That Forrest, in his rage at finding them together, killed both."

We were all silent after that until the train began rumbling into the station at Utica.

"But I have not found out what you are going to do next," I said.

"Let's go," said the chief. "The officers are out after Forrest, and we cannot hurry that matter. The Lee case is closed. The would-be assassin is dead. There is nothing to do."

"But I want to find Beatrice."

"That's a different matter. If you wish to make a charge against her, I will send out an alarm. Or, if you wish, as her husband, to charge someone with spiriting her away, I will send out an alarm."

"Oh, damn your alarms," I said testily. "You have been sending out alarms enough to make the wires hot. And what have they amounted to? A night in a Rainses law hotel found the man you wanted. And the officers in the State are after Forrest and his friendly guard, and what have they accomplished? I'll do the rest of my business myself."

The chief shrugged his shoulders, but looked relieved. James frowned.

"Then, you will not give this to us? You will not allow me to have the marriage annulled?"

"When I learn from the lips of Beatrice that she loved Enland and went away with him, you shall annul the marriage. At present I adhere to my resolution to give my young wife whatever support she may be in need of."

We left the train in the station yard and stopped a moment.

"There is still one thing that puzzled me," said James. "Enland was a friend of James Lee. Why, if he loved Lee's cousin, should he come here in disguise and work with the tactics of a thief to win her?"

A sudden light broke over me.

"I heard James Lee say in the church that he loved Beatrice," I suggested.

"Perhaps that was bad blood between James Lee and Beatrice."